

The administration's top priority, opening new markets for corporate expansion, resulted in a North American Free Trade Agreement that left strong environmental safeguards in limbo, subject to a secretive "dispute resolution" bureaucracy composed of NAFTA trade proponents. The environmental organizations suffered crippling divisions over NAFTA and how to work with the Clinton administration.

The administration has followed a mostly voluntaristic, incentive-based approach to such crises as global warming, which environmentalists would have condemned during the Bush presidency. In California, the administration championed a "cooperative" Bay-Delta agreement with the lords of water export, a compromise that threatened the extinction of spring-run salmon so that Delta water could irrigate crops and recreation in the desert. They have backpedaled from early talk of mandatory fuel efficiency, increased grazing fees, and protection of old-growth forests.

To his credit, the President appointed highly competent environmental advocates to key positions at the EPA, Interior, and even the State Department. And they have fought hard to preserve the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Superfund laws. In comparison with the Gingrich Republicans, of course, the Clintonites look quite green. But so does the color blue when blended with yellow.

Gore himself stated the central issue when he wrote, "The maximum that is politically feasible still falls short of the minimum that is truly effective." How then can the vision of Gore

book be translated into reality? Only by a paradigm shift toward both the environment and politics. The mystical embrace of "growth" by the political culture, combined with the system of fund-raising for elections, dictates that environmentalism will be secondary to special-interest growth agendas. Even with its good intentions, the administration will tend to disappoint its most committed environmental supporters while trying to lessen the opposition of its anti-environmental enemies.

Gore's book, though eloquent in proposing new models of environmental economics and security, is silent on the need for a new model of politics that will support his agenda. In a candid admission, the vice president writes that "I have become very impatient with my own tendency to put a finger to the political winds and proceed cautiously." While the need for more courage and less caution is always welcome, the greater need is for reform of the *system* that cultivates such expediency in the first place. But a political system that arose from Machiavelli's world view and was imposed on an abundant frontier needs to be changed as well. There is little chance of successfully promoting an alternative spiritual and environmental vision in the foul bowels of a system that rewards the expedient pursuit of reckless growth. Gore's wonderful book proposes that we change our thinking about everything except politics itself; while it gives great hope of joining spirituality and environmentalism in mainstream discourse, the task remains of transforming the present boundaries and incentives of politics to let nature and spirit in.